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AUTHOR Hausman, John
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ABSTRACT

More and more, advertising revenue, not circulation or concern for the underdog, seems to be determining the content of American newspapers. As Americans moved to the suburbs, suburban newspapers sprang up, taking readers and advertising revenue away from metropolitan dailies. "Counterattacks" by metropolitan papers such as zoned sections and increased suburban coverage have produced mixed results. Still, the primary goal of the changes has been profits, not service. This concentration on demographics, on reaching the upscale reader, troubles some press and social critics. These critics fear that the dailies will ignore the needs of readers who are not wealthy, well-educated, and acquisitive. Although some of their criticism is naive, neglecting the importance of economics, these critics have pointed to alternatives to advertiser control of newspaper content such as government subsidy or endowment. (JL)

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SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI AT COLUMBIA
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DEMOGRAPHICS AND THE DAILIES: STALKING THE UPSCALE READER

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FREEDOM OF INFORMATION CENTER REPORT NO. 472

This report was written by John Hausman, a master's candidate at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.

I know that my retirement will make no difference in its cardinal principles, that it will always fight for progress and reform, never tolerate injustice or corruption . . . always oppose privileged classes and public plunderers, never lack sympathy with the poor, always be devoted to the public welfare . . . . — Joseph Pulitzer, April 10, 1907, upon retirement from the St. Louis **Post-Dispatch**[1]

We are aiming our product at the people who make more than $18,000 a year and who are in the 28-40 group. (The stories we want) should be obvious: They won't have a damn thing to do with Detroit and its internal problems. — staff memo from Detroit **News** city editor, 1976[2]

Press critic A.J. Liebling, although scornful of what he saw as the rich man's ideology of most newspapers, saw a glimmer of hope:

> The profit system (Liebling wrote in 1947), while it insures the predominant conservative coloration of our press, also guarantees that there will always be a certain amount of dissidence. The American press has never been monolithic, like that of an authoritarian state. One reason is that there is always money to be made in journalism by standing up for the underdog (demogogically or honestly, so long as the technique is good). The underdog is numerous and prolific — another name for him is circulation.[3]

Such a statement could not be made today, in the opinion of some of Liebling's successors. True, Liebling's chief complaint — that right-wing publishers were imposing their beliefs on the editorial pages and news columns of their newspapers — no longer holds as true as it once did. The trend is away from political interference with news content. Fewer and fewer newspapers, particularly those owned by chains, have editorial policies dictated by the personal whims of their owners. Instead, the emphasis is on profits — unsullied by crotchets.

It might seem this would guarantee a concern for the underdog. The greater the circulation, the greater the profits. Right?

Maybe not. Another trait of the American press, also noted by Liebling, foreshadowed a different ethic. Commenting in 1950 on the New York **World-Telegram**'s purchase of the failing **Sun**, he wrote:

> The decision that either the **Sun** or the **World-Telegram** had to disappear from the metropolitan scene was made neither by their proprietors nor by their readers but by the advertising departments of a number of New York retail stores . . . . By cutting down more on their advertising in the **Sun** than in the **World-Telegram**, the department stores rendered their decision.[4]

Therein lies the rub in "standing up for the underdog." Sheer numbers of readers do not dictate profits; advertising dollars do. And these days many advertisers — enough to make a difference in the marketing strategies and editorial content of many newspapers — do not care about the underdog.

THE SUBURBAN EXPLOSION

After World War II, the United States witnessed a great

Summary

The tendency of many newspapers, both metropolitan and suburban, to aim their product at upscale readers, worries press critics. These critics fear that the dailies will thus ignore the needs of readers who are not wealthy, well-educated, and acquisitive.

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middle-class exodus to the suburbs, which grew at a rate of 49 percent in the 1950s, 20 percent in the 1960s and 18 percent in the 1970s. The 1980 census showed that a near-majority of Americans — 45 percent — lived in the suburbs.[5]

As the Laguna Beaches and the Levittowns grew and as their residents felt a growing identification with their new homes, suburban newspapers sprang up and prospered — an "almost overnight creation" in 1948-1952, according to suburban press scholar Hal Lister.[6] Circulation paced population growth. "Community press" circulation rose from 6,284,933 in 1950 to 8,012,374 in 1960 and 9,564,398 in 1968, with the greatest expansion coming from the suburban newspapers.[7]

Newer figures reveal still more startling growth: strictly suburban circulation soared from 9 million in 1965 to 18 million in 1975 and 22 million last year. In the same period, the number of suburban newspapers shot up from 800 to 1,700.[8]

The suburban press ranges from solid, paid-circulation newspapers with a large proportion of news (mainly local) to shoppers consisting exclusively of advertising. In between are the free-distribution weeklies with a small amount of editorial matter scattered amidst ads. Such legitimate newspapers appear from once a week to daily.[9]

Suburban newspapers have spawned their own trade and sales associations. The Suburban Press Association, founded in 1971 by the merger of three earlier groups, is a trade association representing "about 65 percent of what you'd consider the suburban industry," according to executive director James E. Elsener. The association represents about 200 companies, which own more than 1,000 newspapers with a combined circulation of 12 million. Although the trend is toward more frequent publication, 750 of SPA's newspapers are weeklies and only 40 are dailies (most of them former weeklies). SPA represents both paid and free-circulation newspapers.[10]

U.S. Suburban Press Inc., is the national sales representative for more than 1,100 newspapers.[11] It was founded in 1970 "to create suburban newspaper packages in the more important markets of the nation, with minimal duplication."[12]

One campaign by USSPI in 1979 rather ruthlessly urged national advertisers to "drop a daily." In the words of **Advertising Age**, the association "drew a bead on the Chicago **Sun-Times**, Boston **Herald-American** and the second or third largest dailies in major markets."[13]

Another primarily suburban organization is the National Association of Advertising Publishers, a trade association representing shoppers and other free newspapers. NAAP represents some 900 newspapers with a combined circulation of 24 million households.[14]

Not everything the suburban press touches turns to gold. The current recession has hurt the suburban newspapers. In September 1982, Elsener called the previous 12 months "flat" in advertising revenues. "Nevertheless," wrote an **Advertising Age** reporter, "analysts and industry leaders say these woes are temporary as they point to increased national ad linage, to a continuing population shift to the suburbs and to publishers coming up with imaginative and effective ways of dealing with hard times."[15]

THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE

While the suburbans soared, the metros moldered.

Between 1950 and 1968, the circulation of metropolitan dailies declined from 23,444,338 to 20,944,551 (while community newspaper circulation rose by one-half, as noted above).[16] Naturally, many advertisers followed affluent readers to the suburbs, slicing revenue from the metros.[17] Although massive retaliation did not begin until the 1970s, metro publishers did sit up and take notice in those early years of the suburban surge. A few pioneers fought back.

"The metropolitans have evinced growing concern with their suburban competition for nearly two decades now," wrote journalism professor and former weekly publisher John Cameron Sims in 1969.[18] As early as 1958, the city editor of the late Chicago **Daily News** told **Editor & Publisher**: "Community papers have gotten fat as a result of the population growth in the outlying suburban areas of big cities. Metropolitan papers, in turn, find it necessary to have zoned suburban sections and to provide increased 'local' coverage of important community affairs."[19] Indeed, by 1952 the Los Angeles **Times** already began publishing weekly zoned editions.[20]

The metros' woes continued. Newspaper analyst Bruce E. Thorp recently wrote:

> Newspapers, like retail stores, have followed the middle class to the suburbs. . . . Large metropolitan dailies have struggled to keep pace with these developments of the last 30 years. Most found it impossible to cover suburban news in the same depth they covered metropolitan news; there were just too many jurisdictions. . . .
>
> Add to this the difficulty that big-city dailies had in delivering newspapers to suburbs, which expanded rapidly and almost always further away from downtown printing plants.[21]

Other observers blame the metros themselves for their economic problems. By the early 1970s, "the long-growing patterns of decreasing circulation, shrinking advertising budgets and diminishing numbers of readers caused some (metro publishers) to take belated notice," Lister wrote in 1979. These newspapers began to play "catch-up ball," but gave the suburbs "poor-relation treatment," in most cases inserting a weekly page or two of general information about particular suburbs. The sections were later enlarged, Lister wrote, but coverage usually remained half-hearted.[22]

Others agree. Until recently, "the metropolitan newspapers almost abdicated the affluent suburbs to us," according to the publisher and owner of a successful Bay Area suburban newspaper.[23]

No longer. Methods of counterattack range from zoned inserts to total-market coverage in the form of free weeklies jammed with advertiser inserts (a response chiefly to the shoppers), from non-localized but "upscale" special sections aimed at bulging pocketbooks everywhere to outright purchase of existing suburban newspapers.

According to some suburban publishers, certain metros have been predatory, attempting to drive them out of business by selling ad space at a loss, warning merchants not to advertise in suburban newspapers if they want space in the metros, and "stealing" experienced suburban employees, presumably by offering them better jobs.[24]

Battle techniques and results vary from city to city.

St. Louis is usually cited as the prime example of burgeoning suburbans and bludgeoned metros — what **Advertising**

Age calls "the drubbing St. Louis' suburban newspapers are administering to the city's two major dailies."[25] Circulation of the **Post-Dispatch** has dropped about 33 percent since 1970, to 238,099; the **Globe-Democrat**'s circulation has fallen 12 percent, to 261,329.[26] Their combined circulation represents a 55 percent penetration of the market's households. Meanwhile, the area's 36 suburban weeklies distribute a total of 809,604 copies for a penetration rate of 96 percent.[27]

Although it sounds like a many-sided battle, there really are only two competitors in the St. Louis area. The two metros share advertising and production departments, while the weeklies all are owned by either Donnelly Publications Co. or St. Louis Suburban Newspapers. And those suburban chains, whose circulations do not overlap, sell advertising space for each other.[28] That arrangement has resulted in a lawsuit by the **Post-Dispatch**.[29]

As **Advertising Age** said of the St. Louis circulation figures: "These numbers tend to sway advertisers." Most of the area's major grocery stores and shopping centers now advertise chiefly in the suburban papers. In addition to the larger numbers, retailers are attracted by the flexibility of the suburban papers' "zones." Merchants can choose to advertise in one to all 36 newspapers. Taken together, the suburbans cover the entire metropolitan area.[30]

The St. Louis metros have no plans to expand their zone coverage, which now consists of three zones reached by twice-weekly, four-page sections. Instead, they recently instituted "TAP" — total area penetration — by distributing a free, zoned weekly shopper partly as an insert in the **Globe-Democrat**. The shopper will reach some lower income nonsubscribers (a strategy that seemingly flies in the face of the reigning obsession with demographics, as shall be seen). Despite this innovation, ad lineage at the two papers was slightly lower in September than in March.[31] According to newspaper analyst John Morton, the St. Louis metros are the only newspapers in the country losing money on a joint operating agreement.[32]

In Chicago, the two remaining metros follow different approaches. The **Tribune** has run zoned editions for years. It currently publishes nine tabloids collectively called the **Suburban Trib**. Until recently, they were independently produced by an editorial staff of about 100 in a western suburb. There was much duplication of coverage.

But in 1982, the staff was integrated into the **Tribune**, where breaking suburban news now runs daily in one of two zoned editions, "Chicago" or "Chicagoland." The **Suburban Tribs** now concentrate more closely on local markets.

The **Sun-Times** still eschews zoned suburban coverage, instead attempting to attract suburban readers with a weekly, "lifestyle" suburban supplement and with "trend and regional reporting, strong national and world news, and good columnists," as **presstime** paraphrased James F. Hoge, executive vice president and editor-in-chief of the **Sun-Times**. Suburbanites "quite consciously turn to their suburban newspapers for local news," Hoge said. "They do not expect it from us, and in fact if we tried, they probably still would go to their suburban paper."[33]

The results of the two approaches have been mixed. Audit figures released March 31, 1982, showed a daily circulation loss for the **Tribune** of 2.5 percent from the previous year, to 770,798. The **Sun-Times** realized a gain of 0.3 percent, to 663,410.[34]

The Kansas City (Mo.) **Star** runs four, weekly zoned sections inserted in the regular newspaper — the only connection apparent to the reader. The inserts have local, separate names and carry no identification with the parent **Star**. They even list separate, suburban office addresses.[35] Despite that effort, the evening **Star** posted a circulation loss of 5 percent from 1981 to 1982, down to 240,529.[36]

The Los Angeles **Times** is continuing its 30-year tradition of zoned sections, publishing eight of them twice a week. It also "is considering a mail program for the suburbs that may or may not include editorial material," according to **presstime**. An earlier free weekly paper, **The Best of the Times**, was canceled after five months, perhaps because of lack of local coverage.[37]

Tom Johnson, publisher of the **Times** since 1980, recently told **Washington Journalism Review** that he expects increased competition from suburban dailies. The **Times** must respond by improving its suburban sections and increasing its focus on local news — high school sports and the like — Johnson said. "We must accelerate that both for news and for advertising."[38]

The **Times**' metropolitan competitor, the Hearst-owned Los Angeles **Herald-Examiner** (whose 285,656 circulation, up 0.2 percent over 1981, is barely larger than that of the suburban Orange County **Register**'s 251,647, up 5.4 percent), has simply bought up 30 community newspapers and started two new ones. Advertisers may buy space in one Hearst paper or in combinations including the **Herald-Examiner**. The parent newspaper has lost 150,000 circulation to the region's many suburban papers since the mid-1960s, according to its publisher.[39]

A more common variation on the theme of buying out suburban newspapers is to buy them in distant markets. The (Chicago) Tribune Co. has done so in Van Nuys, Calif. The (Los Angeles) Times-Mirror Co. entered the Long Island, New York, market. And Cowles' Minneapolis **Tribune** has bought its way into the Denver area.[40]

Suburban newspapers have been quick to fill the vacuum in areas where metropolitan newspapers recently have died. In fact, some attribute the end of the Philadelphia **Bulletin** to competition from the more than 200 weeklies and dailies surrounding that city.[41] Most Philadelphia suburban dailies are afternoon papers, as was the **Bulletin**. In the opinion of one suburban publisher there, readers came to rely on television for national and world news and on their suburban papers for local news after work. About 77 percent of the Philadelphia-area work force both lives and works in the suburbs.[42]

Philadelphia's morning metro, the **Inquirer**, has thrived by concentrating on metropolitan coverage and branching out from there, according to executive editor Eugene L. Roberts. The **Inquirer** does run four zoned editions, including a city zone.[43] And it started a weekly tabloid supplement called **Neighbors** in one outlying county after the **Bulletin**'s demise. By March 1982, the **Inquirer** had benefited from the death of the **Bulletin** to the tune of a 27.7 percent circulation increase over the previous year, to 547,547.[44]

Many suburban Philadephia papers also profited when the **Bulletin** ceased publication. Indeed, some prepared themselves for it in advance by switching to morning publication to prepare for head-on competition with the **Inquirer**. "We began thinking about the demise of the **Bulletin** at least two

years prior to the actual event," said an executive of one suburban group.[45]

Similar scrambles for position took place in Washington D.C. and Cleveland when the **Star** and the **Press** respectively bit the dust. In the case of the Cleveland **Press**, one suburban chain swiftly added new supplements to its papers, and others stepped up their coverage of Cleveland's Cuyahoga County.[46] In the suburbs around the nation's capital, the **Journal** chain immediately announced an expansion from twice-weekly to daily publication, putting it in direct competition with the Washington **Post**.[47]

Sometimes the tables are turned. Late in 1981, Multimedia Inc. abruptly killed five of its six Nashville Suburban Newspapers, leaving 93,000 households up for grabs. Although opinions about the failure varied, one theme was often mentioned — the papers were not local enough, they lacked strong identities with their communities.[48]

This neatly illustrates a universal explanation for the popularity of suburban newspapers: their localness. "If somebody has a son in high school playing on a football team, he takes an interest in reading about it in his local paper," one observer explained. "You won't find his son's name in the big-city paper."[49]

The metros have responded to this desire for local news with their zoned editions and with outright purchase of existing community papers. But, as Sims pointed out in 1969, "Naturally the mets'concern is not primarily that some important news sector will go uncovered, but rather that too much ad revenue is being siphoned off by the burgeoning suburbans."[50] The issue is profits, not service.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The "targeting" of the suburbs is based partly on retail geography. It isn't economical for a store to pay high advertising rates to reach readers outside its area. It prefers to buy space only in a local suburban paper or a zoned edition of a metro.[51]

Targeting also is based on demographics, a desire to reach well-off, "upscale," consumers, most of whom live in the suburbs. Underdogs don't count for much in this scheme of things.

Newspaper concern with demographics comes through clearly in campaigns by both suburban and metro papers to attract national advertisers. "As they battle for larger and more sophisticated ad clients," wrote business reporter B.G. Yovovich in 1980, "suburban ad salesman are finding that demographics can be an all-important and very effective weapon in their sales arsenal."[52] Landon Associates, on behalf of the suburban press, released a study showing that the average household income of suburban readers was 40 to 50 percent higher than that of all U.S. households.[53]

In 1979 the president of USSPI summed up the appeal of the suburban press for both national and local advertisers:

> U.S. Suburban Press delivers upscale suburbanites to advertisers. . . . The suburbs now lead the city in all these major classifications: Automotive sales, food sales, effective buying income, households and education. When an advertiser buys USSPI, he is buying only the suburbs, where the buying power is without center-city duplication and waste.[54]

Suburban newspapers are not the only ones peeking into their readers' bankbooks and resumes. A recent, two-page color spread placed by the Chicago **Tribune** in **Advertising Age** makes this Waterford Crystal-clear.

"TAKE AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT CHICAGO'S BETTER-LOOKING AUDIENCE," the ad is headed.

> Chicago **Tribune** readers comprise the richer, choicer audience, all the way down the line. They're better educated, hold better jobs, have higher personal incomes and thus exert more spending power.
>
> . . . And **Tribune** readers have a history of being Chicago's biggest consumers. . . our readers spend big . . . 7 out of 10 buyers of everything from alcoholic beverages to small appliances . . . take a long look at the depth of our reader . . . .

That "depth" is demonstrated by two series of color paintings — one on each side of the ad — of the newspaper's presumably typical readers in their different demographic guises. Each reader, one male and one female, is "better-looking," white, well-coiffed, and wears a sincere, intelligent smile in all five poses. Each looks healthy, prosperous and 33 — a demographer's delight.

The man, wearing suitable clothing and holding up an appropriate totem for each persona, "Holds a top management position . . . . Owns a new car . . . . Takes at least one domestic flight per year . . . . Has a college education or better . . . . Earns at least $35,000 per year."

The woman, apparently more money-conscious, "Owns over $5,000 in securities . . . . Spent at least $1,000 on women's apparel last year" (here she wears a fur coat and modestly holds up her right hand to display several sparkling rings and a bracelet) . . . . "Spends at least $125 on groceries per week . . . . Lives in a home valued at $75,000 or more . . . . Has a personal income of at least $20,000."

And, to seal the sale, in the foremost picture each holds up (although neither looks at) an identical copy of the Chicago **Tribune**. The stories promoted at the top of Page One, above the flag: "Tips for your eyes" (with a picture of a woman applying false eyelashes), "Corporate dress codes," "ZINGO BINGO/$15,000 in prizes" and "How foods affect us."[55]

Depth aside, this concentration on demographics, on reaching the upscale reader, troubles some press and social critics.

CRITICS

Ben Bagdikian condemned the demographic ethos in a 1978 article, "The Best News Money Can Buy":

> The new corporate ethic in news is ending the impulse to get the news to as many people as possible. Sophisticated merchandizing (sic) strategies by advertisers and media response to those strategies is altering the role of major news institutions in American society. Metropolitan newspapers wish to sell their papers only to the affluent, and they are using marketing techniques to design their content and control their circulation primarily for the

benefit of big spenders.[56]

To Bagdikian, this is precisely the opposite of what society needs. He contends that affluent Americans already have "enormous advantages" over the poor in obtaining information, thanks to more education, travel, skill in using books and periodicals, and so forth. "In that sense, it is the central cities that need systematic news more than anyone else."[57]

He sees newspapers returning to their pre-Civil War role as a medium of elite communications, a retreat from the mass-circulation era in which the newspaper "was an important factor in the democratization of elections and inhibited the rush to rigid class separation."[58] Now, the 'quality' of audience is more important, and 'quality' is defined by the major advertisers" — witness the Chicago **Tribune** trade ad. "What the advertisers want in a newspaper and its distribution are not the same as what the average citizen wants in the newspaper," Bagdikian says.[59]

He brushes aside arguments against coverage of the central city:

> The blackout of news to the central city is usually justified by publishers on grounds that it is harder to sell papers there, that it is difficult to hire and keep delivery people on the job and there is a higher rate of nonpayment of bills. This is true, and it has always been true. The difference now is that advertisers don't want that population, so now the publishers don't, either.[60]

Two California journalism professors have made similar claims about the Los Angeles **Times**, although in less sweeping terms. Felix Gutierrez and Clint C. Wilson, writing in **Columbia Journalism Review**, suggested there is "an unspoken fear among newspaper executives that improving their papers' coverage of minorities might loosen their hold on the affluent, mostly white readers coveted by advertisers."[61]

They compare the **Times'** numerous zoned, suburban editions with the lack of any for Los Angeles' large Chicano or black populations (a Central Zone ceased publication in 1974).[62] While granting that there had been progress since Otis Chandler inherited the newspaper in 1960, the authors suggested that the paper still has a long way to go.

Chandler already had stated frankly the link between coverage and circulation:

> (It) would not make sense financially for us to direct the paper to low-income readers because that audience does not have the purchasing power and is not responsive to the kind of advertising we carry . . . . Our major retail advertisers have said to us that we want a certain class of audience, a certain demographic profile of reader, whether that person be black, white, or brown or Chinese or whatever. We don't really care what sex or race they are. But we do care about their income . . . .[63]

The authors reply that better coverage of minority news need not result in a newspaper "aimed primarily at low-income readers."[64] They suggest that, considering long-range population trends, it may be in the **Times'** (and other metros') self-interest to boost minority coverage.[65]

Less calmly than either Bagdikian or Gutierrez and Wilson, an editor of **Harper's** in 1977 blasted the New York **Times** for its new upscale sections. Earl Shorris, in "Cutting Velvet at the New York **Times**," argues:

> The newspaper that had always been a service for the affluent, with particular emphasis on affluent men, became a service for affluent women as well. This was a marketing decision, more easily comprehensible to shopkeepers than to analysts of the subtlety of the press.[66]

The chief danger of what Shorris saw as a focus on the doings of the rich, on "gossip" and "acquisitiveness," is an isolation from real life:

> A reader of the **Times** can be comfortable living in a nation where at least 25 million people, almost half of them children, suffer poverty, in a city where over a million people have nothing but welfare payments to keep them alive, and where entire neighborhoods have been burned out or left to rot.[67]

Dominique Wolton, a French scholar who toured American newsrooms in 1978, also warned about social divisions being widened by such techniques as zoned editions:

> Marketing strategies which favor the compartmentalization of information and the particularization of readership mark a break in a long tradition. Since the eighteenth century, the press has struggled to offer the most general information possible to as wide a public as possible. The availability of universal information is one of the gains of the democratic era.[68]

Anthony Smith, a British observer, echoed such concerns. But he concluded a long report on the impact of new media technology and marketing concepts with a statement that puts the critiques of Bagdikian, Wolton and others into a different perspective:

> The new technology itself does not change social formation. It merely brings home to us some unpalatable truths about the kind of social dividing lines we already have.[69]

CONCLUSIONS

The critics leave themselves open to criticism.

The Shorris jeremiad would be more convincing were he not so aggressively ignorant of economic reality. For example: "A newspaper augments the money it earns from circulation with the money paid by advertisers" — as if newspapers came out ahead on each copy sold and advertising were a mere extra. Or: "The objects of these new services appear to be women, whom the editors of the **Times** seem to view through the lovingly disdainful eyes of mother-dominated

sons'"[70] — as if market research didn't exist, and the new content were selected by editors' whims and guesswork.

Bagdikian and Wolton seem unrealistically sentimental about the past. "Mass" and "class" newspapers always have existed in the United States. It seems unlikely that the rich and poor truly shared a common daily experience in the days when Hearst's New York **Journal** and the good, gray **Times** coexisted. As Smith points out, class divisions are nothing new in America.

But their basic argument stands. Many metropolitan newspapers are jettisoning their urban, poor, minority, or old readers and dropping whatever coverage (beyond sensational crimes and glittering celebrities) they may once have given the cities whose names they bear . More and more newspapers only want the "better-looking" readers — the ones with "depth."

The obvious answer to the critics is, of course, that newspapers have no choice. As one observer almost contemptuously put it: "The prime function of a newspaper is to make a profit. Otherwise, all the fine-sounding high speeches (sic) about worthy social action would be impossible."[71]

Actually, the contention is debatable that metros, to survive, must "zone" or otherwise tailor their contents to appeal only to the affluent. Several newspaper analysts, as noted above, contend that zoned editions truly cannot compete with suburban papers in local coverage.

John Morton and others argue that the real solution is total market coverage, which need not affect the contents of the daily paper.[72] Besides, no one argues that metro monopolies — which increasingly are the rule — are in danger of collapse. Morton doubts that "many suburban groups could ever be as profitable as the average monopoly central-city daily" (and all central-city dailies will be monopolies some day, he predicted).[73]

But assume that a focus on upscale readers is necessary for survival and not just one more way to maximize profit. (In the case of second or third metros in a competitive city, this may be true, although, as Morton says, the effort may be futile anyway.) This brings us back to Liebling's concern about advertisers' control of the press. Is such a condition desirable for anyone besides advertisers and the owners of the winning papers? If not, do alternatives exist that are compatible with the First Amendment?

Possibly. Most Western European governments grant press subsidies of various kinds. The result is greater diversity of expression than exists in the United States, as Robert Picard's research at the University of Missouri demonstrates. Another intriguing idea was proposed by Liebling:

> I think that a good newspaper is as truly an educational institution as a college, so I don't see why it should have to stake its survival on attracting advertisers of ball-point pens and tickets to Hollywood peep shows. And I think that private endowment would offer greater possibilities for a free press than state ownership. . . . The hardest trick, of course, would be getting the chief donor of the endowment (perhaps a repentant tabloid owner) to (a) croak, or (b) sign a legally binding agreement never to stick his face in the editorial rooms. The best kind of an endowment for a newspaper would be one made up of several large and many small or medium-sized gifts.[74]

Whatever alternatives are considered, the crucial point, ignored by apologists for the "economic necessity" of demographic tailoring, is this: Advertiser control is not the only possible model for the American press. The crucial question then becomes: Is advertiser control, with all its consequences, tolerable?

FOOTNOTES

1. From "The **Post-Dispatch** Platform," printed daily on editorial page.
2. Quoted in Ben Bagdikian, "The Best News Money Can Buy," **Human Behavior**, October 1978, p. 64.
3. Abbott Joseph Liebling, **The Press** (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), p. 18.
4. Ibid., p. 58.
5. Ed Zott,, "Suburban Myths Sail Out the Window," **Advertising Age**, 20 September 1982, p. M-20.
6. Hal Lister, "Diehard Skeptics Miss the Boat," **Advertising Age**, 3 September 1979, p. S-1.
7. Lister, "The Suburban Press: A Separate Journalism," master's thesis at the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, December 1971, p. 31.
8. Alvin P. Sanoff, "For Healthy Newspapers, Look to the Suburbs," **U. S. News and World Report**, 31 May 1982, p. 61.
9. Ibid., pp. 61-62.
10. C. David Rambo, "Suburbans vs. Metros: Newspaper Civil War," **presstime**, August 1982, p. 38.
11. Ibid.
12. Bob Hanson, "USSPI Eases Hassles for National Advertisers," **Advertising Age**, 3 September 1979, p. S-23.
13. Margaret LeRoux, "Suburb Papers Eye National Ads," **Advertising Age**, 21 May 1979, p. 8.
14. Bruce E. Thorp, "Key to Success? Stay Local," **Advertising Age**, 20 September 1982, p. M-8.
15. Renee Blakkan, "Co-op Ads Offer Relief in Otherwise Flat Ad-land," **Advertising Age**, 20 September 1982, p. M-16.
16. Lister, "The Suburban Press," p. 31.
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